



Yecla

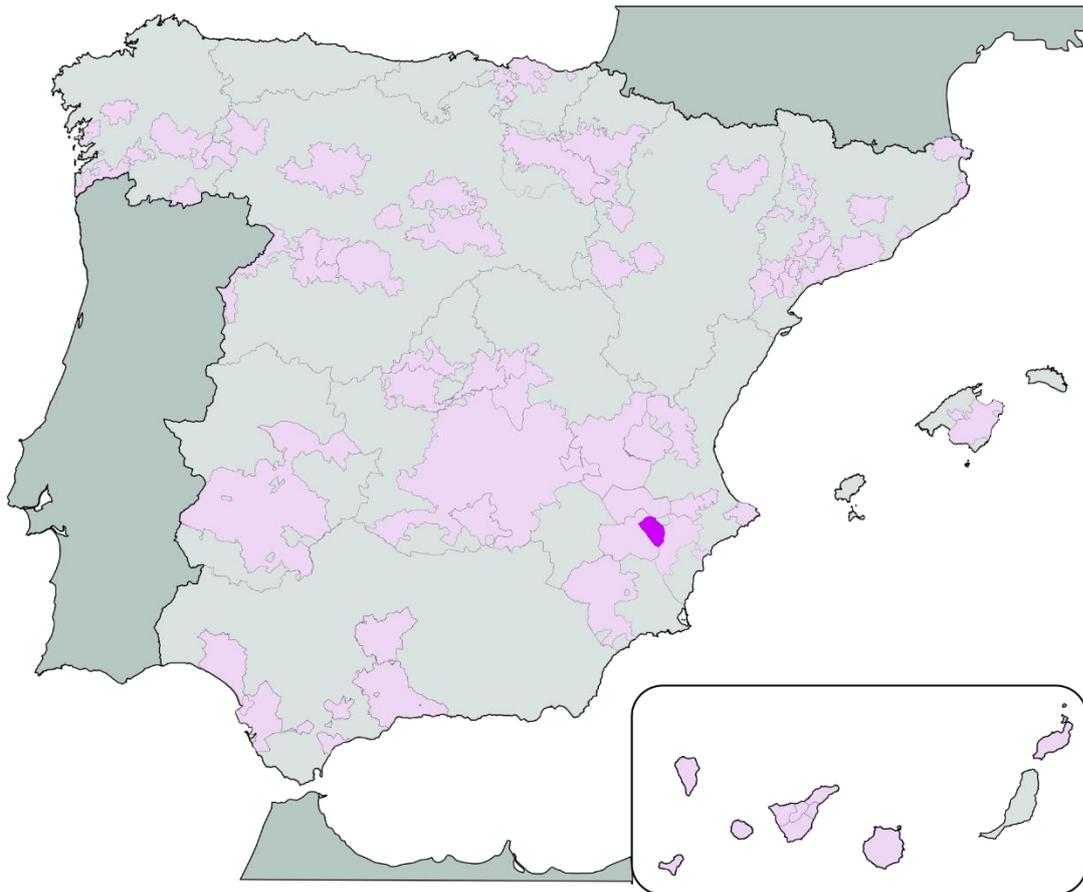
I am a member of the Association of (Dutch) Wine Teachers and from the Spanish Embassy we attended the 'Specialist Spanish Wine' course and all passed the exam successfully. The Spanish organization ICEX, which promotes exports from Spain and investments in Spain, provided this training. Now there was a request from the Embassy if 2 of us wanted to go to Yecla to visit the DO and some of its 'Bodegas' and report the findings. That became Me and Caroline Cocheret from Wijndocent.nl. Furthermore Anne-Wies van Oosten and Ingrid Larmoyeur from the Netherlands and 3 more participants from Belgium. It was also the ICEX organization that had the organization. A very 'gezellige' group of people together. A word whose meaning we have explained to the Spanish people. It is not translatable; cosy is the closest by. And it sure was fun! And more importantly... beautiful wines are made there.

DOP Yecla

Where is Yecla? And what does Yecla stand for?

History

Archaeological excavations in the area have confirmed that grape growing and wine production has been practiced in this area for over 2000 years and was probably introduced by the ancient Romans. There was a period of expansion at the end of the 19th century when French wine merchants became involved in the region as a result of the destructive effect of the phylloxera. The official DO status was acquired in 1975.



Geography.

The vineyards covered by Yecla DOP are located in a transition area between the Mediterranean Sea and the central high plateaus known as La Mancha, at altitudes ranging from 400 to 800 meters above sea level. The soil is calcareous and the subsoil is thick with a high carbonate content. The topsoil is sandy, poor in organic matter, deep with good permeability. In the sandy soils, ungrafted vines have even been planted because the phylloxera cannot dig its tunnels there, so more clay is needed in the soil to let the phylloxera survive

Climate.

The climate is Mediterranean-continental, with long, hot, dry summers and cold winters. The maximum temperature in summer can reach until 39°C (and more) and the minimum temperature in winter as low as -10°C. Precipitation is scarce, 300 to 400 mm per year, mainly in autumn and spring, sometimes in the form of violent storms. Sunlight hours high, about 3,000 hours per year.

The grapes

The Monastrell grape (or movèdre in French) is the most widely planted grape variety and this late-ripening grape variety is excellent for this climate.

The permitted grape varieties are:

Reds: Monastrell, Garnacha Tinta, Garnacha Tintorera, Tempranillo, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

White: Airén, Merseguera, Macabeo, Moscatel de Grano Menudo, Malvasía, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay.



The outward journey.

We started with a 45 minute delay on the flight from Amsterdam to Valencia. Then the luggage was on a different belt than it said on the sign. After half an hour a lady came to tell us that was the case. So already 75 minutes late. We were taken by taxi from Valencia to Casa Boquera where we would also sleep for the next 3 nights. This also took 1.5 hours. In the program stand that we would start with Welcome and presentation by the standing committee of the DO Yecla and lunch in the restaurant CASA BOQUERA. Due to the late arrival, we literally barged in and there was no presentation and no one else introduced themselves so we sat down to the table and caught up on the courses. This was not unpleasant by the way: see in the photo above; stuffed artichoke, mozzarella salad, salmon with toast, entrecôte or sea bass and a delicious chocolate dessert with whipped cream. But we had no idea who we were sitting with at the table. After lunch we had a presentation of Casa Boquera with a tasting of the wines.



Casa Boquera

Catherine and Harald from Norway fell in love with this environment and therefore bought Casa Boquera 10 years ago.

The winemaker is Rafael, who has been here for 13 years. His family already had a small vineyard and has been involved in wine since he was very small. He did his wine education in Valencia. The vines are planted in 2014. In total 15 hectares have been planted here: 6 hectares of Monastrell and furthermore Garnacha and Syrah.

There is poor soil here with 4000 kg yield production per ha.

In the first few years we also bought grapes and from 2019 we will only make wine from our own grapes.

White: moscato, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. And we also make rosé from 100% Monastrell, manual picking, the first selection is done in the vineyard. The second selection is on the sorting table. Only the best quality is used here, the rest of the grapes are sold. Before the blue grapes are fermented, they first undergo a cold maceration of 5 days. Then into the tank so that the fermentation starts

spontaneously with wild yeast. After fermentation, pressing is carried out, the must is kept separately. Pressed wine and aging wine are not kept separately because there is a light pressing of up to 1 kg, then in the tank and malo then in large tanks and later in barrique 90% French and 10% American oak. At the end filtering before bottling. They produce 40.000 bottles a year.

The wines.

White : Sauvignon Blanc, muscatel and Chardonnay 2021 slightly pungent. Slightly farmy scent, floral and vanilla, ripe apple, slightly bulky wine, medium (+) body, some length. 1000 bottles are produced from this wine.

Rosé Monastrell 2022 partly direct pressing and partly a short maceration. Not the same every year, this year the color was very present, red fruit candy in the smell, dry wine tingling (spicy) on the tongue, medium(-) body, 13.5% alcohol medium acidity.

Red: Young 2021 Monastrell 60% and Garnacha 40%. A modern made wine. Lots of fruit in the nose dark from Monastrell and raspberry and cherry 🍒 from Garnacha. Medium(+) body and tannins (still slightly rough) medium (+) length medium (+) taste.

Semicrianza 2018 70% Monastrell and 30% Syrah with wood aging, dark fruit, vanilla pepper, medium(+) body, firm rough tannins, lots of flavor and length, rustic wine. 8 euro.

Elegante Crianza 2017, Monastrell 60% and Petit Verdot 40%, has 7 months of wood aging. 7 euros. Dark ruby, aromas of blackberries, blueberries, slightly vanilla, medium(+) body, slightly more complex, delicious dining wine, also softer tannins.

Special edition 2017 100% Petit Verdot dark slightly rustic, balsamic in the nose, a complex solid wine, tannins firm but fine grained, 1 year barrique and 18 months bottleaging. They produce 1500 bottles a year from this wine. 15 euro.





Ceiling of the theatre.

Yecla tour

After the tasting we board the bus to Yecla City. A tour awaits us there. The theater is viewed from the inside, a classically decorated Milanese-style theater with beautiful ceiling paintings. The Basilica is also visited, which contain niches with statues and paintings. Then it's time to go to restaurant for our first dinner in Yecla. We go to restaurant Ruta del Vino which serves traditional local dishes and of course with the

wines of Yecla. Fried cheese, beans, squid, spiced mushrooms, potatoes with bacon and egg and we finished with coffee.





Yecla day 2

We are in the vineyard of Barahonda and Alfredo Candela tells. Yecla is the only DO that is within the city limits that extends 608 m². The city is only 75 kilometres from the Mediterranean Sea, but the mountains shield it from the influence of the Mediterranean Sea, which is why it has a dry continental climate and there is only 300-400 ml of rain per year. Hot summers and cold winters. So suitable for Monastrell. Where we are now it is at 783 meters altitude and here are cold nights so that the grapes retain their freshness.

The low part, Campa Abajo 500-650 and the high part, Campo Arriba has 600-1000 meters altitude.

The ground is different from the ground in Arriba; it is poorer and contains more stones. No irrigation is used here and it is planted in bush vine: this gives more concentration and therefore better Monastrell. There is also less wind in Arriba. In Murcia the weather is more stable. So here it is more extreme and certainly very dry this year and the harvest has already started on 9 August and the drone continued until the end of October.

Why is Yecla so famous? That's because of the Monastrell and also Tintorera

20 years ago, 25,000 hectares were planted here. But now it is reduced to 6000 ha. Previously a lot of bulk wine and now more focus on quality. 72% Monastrell. The vines, where we are now, are 50-55 years old.

Ungrafted vines can be planted here because there are areas where there is no clay in the soil and so the phyloxera has no hold on the vines because they cannot dig tunnels. Only the rules don't allow it. 45% is certified organic, which is also possible here due to the drought there is no fungal pressure. 95% works organically but is not certified. There is also a part biodynamic (they call it Biosuisse here, not surprising when you know that Rudolf Steiner, the founder of the Biodynamic movement, comes from Switzerland). The yield is low; a maximum of 40 hl is allowed, but from these vineyards that is only 20 hl and this year, due to the drought, only 15 hl but very concentrated. Also tasted a grape that stuck: small grapes, lots of sugar and taste with a thick skin. The Bodega Barahonda was founded in 1925.



The Dutch delegation



Chapel, protected oak, cellar of the house.

Barahonda Winery

Antonio Candela now takes us to the winery of Barahonda. We first go to the old winery in the city where underground wine cellars can still be seen. We also see how wine is tapped from the wall in jerry cans. Then we go to the new winery that is also located between the vineyards. First we go to the parental home where he and his brother always live every other year. It is an authentic house with a separate chapel, where people also get married.

At Barahonda 12 million kilos of grapes are processed per year. In the past there were underground stone wine fermentation and storage cellar to have sufficient cooling. And for the premium wines they go back to concrete instead of stainless steel.

There's a fly here that lays eggs in the middle of the bunch of grapes. When the fly hatches, it destroys the inner grapes and then the bunch rots. This is combated with pheromones (sexual confusion). The production is 1,500,000 a year. 700 hectares are processed here and they have 155 hectares of it themselves. This is where the grapes come in and for the best wine, the grapes are still sorted. Depending on the wine and grape variety, native or selected yeast is used. In the barrel cellar, the humidity is brought to the exact right level. The top wines have the malolactic fermentation in wooden barrels.

The cellar is kept at the right temperature with the energy from the solar panels.



The wines.

We taste the barrel Monastrell 2021 de Nariz; still a beautiful powerful refined wine, firm but already soft tannins and subtle vanilla, well balanced.

2021 Organic 55% Sauvignon Blanc and 45% Verdejo, 12% alcohol, slightly vegetal in the nose. A simple fresh fruity wine for every day drinking, has some length. Consumer price 5.50 euros. Export 2.90 euros.

2021 organic Monastrell 60% Merlot 40%, only stainless steel, 14.5% alcohol, blackberries, blueberries, plums, medium body, slightly juicy wine, soft tannins, a good every day drinking wine. 6 euros exports 3.10 euros.

2019 organic barrica, 6 months barrique, 60% Monastrell 40% Syrah (Bosman wines is the importer in the Netherlands), vanilla in the nose and in taste you can find something peppery, soft medium (+) tannin. Nice wine, not too heavy, well balanced. 8 euros exports 3.75 euros.

Summum 2019 organic 100% Monastrell. The vanilla and coconut jumps out of the glass, but so does the dark fruit, 15.5% alcohol, 16 months American oak. Firm tannins but soft, lots of body, a lot of wood slightly predominant in the taste and also a bit spicy. Very drinkable but still has to lie down for a while. 16 euros in the shop and export price 9 euros.



The lunch

2019 Viognier type private wine fragrant wine, some wood and a lot of taste, very fine wine!

On a vine are leaves in the shape of the Monastrell leave in mushroom flavor and of beet root.

Soup of beef consomme, ham croquette, fried cheese and pate with sweet wine.

The next wine is the same but from 2020.

Crème brulée of grain and a crunchy of corn with coriander and lime.

Wine of the next course is the 2019 Monastrell 75% Syrah 20% Petit Verdot 5%, 12 months oak, a solid wine with a good structure and lots of flavor and spiciness, well balanced.

Tuna with black garlic and pepper sauce and Tuna with smoked ash

Wine: Lualma 2019 Monastrell, Tintorera and Syrah, a fine nose, a nice wine.

Hake with Calero sauce (fish and rice).

Wine: the top cuvee 2011 100% Monastrell 22 months new French barrique, still a nice fresh nose, spicy subtle notes of tobacco and vanilla. Soft powerful wine spicy on the palate.

Suckling Pig with a reduced sauce of tomatoes, pepper, etc. and a round of Mojomuciano sauce and Figs and a crunch with Hoisin sauce.

Dessert: Chocolate mousse and a banana shape of white chocolate, banana and hazelnut and then a variety of cheeses.

I think I'll just stay here.....

And then the late harvest Monastrell desert wine Bellum; just nice .

Finally, coffee with a lollipop of the sweet Monastrell, cookies with nut cream and a bonbon with soft chocolate on the inside and white on the outside with balls of rice that separate in your mouth.

Incredibly beautiful dishes and certainly at Michelin star level and beautifully cooked to the wines. Because of the sauces that are used, everything has more taste to match the food with the wines. Everything is also presented in a very stylish way. If you are in the area I would definitely eat here.

After lunch we will be taken to Castaño Winery.

Castaño



Winemaker Angela

Angela is one of the winemakers and belongs to the family. She has already made wine all over the world to take her knowledge back home. Raquel says: Here we are now in the vineyards of Espinal, it is lower here (400-600m) and the Monastrell is not irrigated here. The vines here are over 50 years old. In addition to Monastrell, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay have also been planted, as well as a plot with experimental grape varieties. This is 80 ha of a total of 400 ha. There are also bought. A total of 4,000,000 liters of wine is produced, from approximately 1750 ha. Everything is organic from the next harvest.



We taste 4 wines

Macabeo 2022, a barrel sample; a lot of taste some aniseed, soft, slightly bitter; fresh wine with quite a bit of flavour, medium body and quite a bit of length.

Rosé 2022 barrel sample: pink, candies in the nose, fresh wine 12% alcohol and soft.

Red 2021: Merlot, Garnacha, Syrah and a little Monastrell, light in colour, juicy wine, medium soft tannins, 13% alcohol. Some length, nice wine.

Red 2020 barrique: Monastrell 14% alcohol. 4 months wood American and French. Dark blackberry, blueberry, hint of vanilla. More medium (+) tannins, still a bit grippy, I think it should be a nice wine with some ageing, well balanced.





Raquel, Angela, Mariano and Ksenia

Now into the wine cellar

There are boilers up to 100,000 litre here. The bottling line has a maximum capacity of 6,000 bottles per hour.

After the cellar tour, we meet the winemaker Mariano who has been making wine here for 34 years. He explains that they are increasingly making better quality labels.



We're going to taste again.

Hécula (nickname of Yecla) 2020 100% Monastrell, 6 months French oak 80% and American 20%, 50 year old vines on limestone soil. Fruity (dark fruit), hint of vanilla, high tannins but well integrated, long warming finish, 14.5% alcohol. Fine wine. 6.90 euros.

2017 Castaño Colección, 70% Monastrell, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 months of oak, same proportion as the Hécula, 60% new, 14.5% alcohol. Is from the owned vineyards and picked by hand. Dark in colour, more vanilla and toast, blueberries, cassis, blackberries in the nose, high tannins slightly softer, juicy wine also a bit burning. This wine will be delicious with food, good structure. 12.30 euros.

Santa 2016, 90% Monastrell, 10% Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouchet), 14 months new French and American oak, 15% alcohol. Dark wine, lots of wood, dark fruit and tobacco on the nose, medium (+) body, high tannins but soft, lots of flavor with ripe fruit and tobacco, mocha and lots of length. Top wine! A lot of wood and the alcohol and is better integrated. 17.30 euros in the shop.

Casa de la Cera 2015, 50% Monastrell, 50% Garnacha Tintorera, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot, 20 months new 500 liter barrels of French and American oak, 15% alcohol. Dark wine, nice nose; vanilla, toast, tobacco, mocha and dark fruit, full body, lots of flavour, high tannins but fine grained, lots of length, give me a box! 33.50 euros.

Casa Cisca 2016, 100% Monastrell, 16 months, 30% French and 70% American oak, 80 to more than 100 year old vines, 15.5% alcohol, dark, the vanilla and coconut pops out, but also dark fruit and mocha, nicely concentrated wine, full body, firm soft tannins, intense taste, alcohol burns in the aftertaste but not annoying, a lot of length. Also a lovely wine. 34.60 euros.

The same wine but now from 2011, More brown in colour; garnet red, maggi, chocolate, tobacco and mocha in the nose, also firm, more development, some fruit in the taste, alcohol 15% is slightly more present but still a top wine.

Dulce Monastrell 2018: 6 months oak barrels, late harvest 20hl per ha, is fortified at 6% to 15.5%, late harvest and therefore acids are added to get freshness. Dark, figs, raisins, fresh blackberries and blueberries, fresh sweet wine with a lot of body and length.



Then it's time to sit down at the dinner table.

We start Iberico ham with cheese platter, then nut salad with goat cheese, bacon, a crispy and finished with honey vinaigrette, then garlic shrimp croquettes, gyozas (kind of dumpling) with humus and demiglace sauce from its own gravy and as main course lamb with chestnut sauce then vinomisú for dessert. And all this accompanied by the Castaño wines. Satisfied we are taken back to our hotel.



Yecla day 3

Today the reception in the town hall is on the schedule. We proceed to the council chamber. The local TV is also present. The mayor and then the president Rafaël Derdú of the DO Yecla welcome us. Many photos are taken and someone is interviewed from each group, Belgians and Dutch.



Then on to the cooperative La Purísima.

We are welcomed by Pedro José Azorin, the winemaker here, Frederico Marco, the export manager and José Louis Quilez, the CEO. Paco, who has been working in the shop here for 35 years, knows exactly which customer wants which blend. Frederico has the floor. In 1975 the DO Yecla is founded. 10 million kilos of grapes of almost 2000 ha are processed here, 90% red and 40% is organic. The weather is important here and so is the altitude of the vineyards that are located between 600-900 meters. There are 1200 members of the cooperation. The winegrowers are checked and are only allowed to harvest after permission. There can be storms with hail here so there is a risk of destroying the crop. That is why the winegrowers prefer to harvest as quickly as possible. They can insure themselves against the storm and hail, but it is expensive. The last 6 years there was enough rain but this year it was very dry. There is a lot of heat here, so a lot of sugar accumulation and therefore alcohol in the wine.

Water supply is centrally distributed and paid for. There is 50 ha of 70 to 80 year old vines ungrafted (piefranco). The grapes from these vines are used for the top wines.

It is unfortunately forbidden from the EU to plant ungrafted vines, there is no clay in some parts and it is very dry, so the phyloxera on those parts of the vineyard, cannot have a hold.

The grapes are paid on the basis of quality and compliance with the regulations.

There are stainless steel tanks up to 850,000 litres here! Mostly 100,000 litres. And there's a 90,000-kilo press here! They just purchased a new bottling line that can process 3500-4000 bottles per hour. There are 600 oak barrels 60% French and 40% American. There are even two barrels of 2 million liters outside, but these are no longer used.

The top wines go into new barrels, which are then used for other wine. A separate barrel is used for vinification per grape variety.



The wines

Old hand blanc 2022 from the barrel; soft and fruity 5 euros.

Consentido 2022 100% macabeo from the barrel, now 1 month in oak. Fragrant wine floral, some anise, hint of vanilla, fresh wine quite a bit of body; 4.45 euros.

Estío Rosé 2022 cask 70% Monastrell, 20% Syrah, 10% Merlot. light nose, red fruit, fresh easy drinking wine, they make it lighter because the importer wants it. Too bad, you get less taste like this.

Estío red 2021, 70% Monastrell 30% Syrah, stainless steel fermentation. Fragrant blackberries, plums, cassis, medium (+) soft tannins, fine fruity wine, drink it slightly cooled. 3.50 euros. Export 1.80 4.95 at Henri Bloem.

La Purísima 2021 Monastrell 14% alcohol from different vineyards of different heights. Medium aroma's, they now use micro embullage to soften the tannins. Dark fruit, more structure, a fine wine! 4.90 euros in the shop

Consentido 2021, Syrah 13.5%, fairly young vines. Modest aroma's of some blackberries, and blueberries, medium(+) tannins , a bit peppery on the tongue. Medium (+) body, nice wine 4.35 euros.

Consentido 2020 barrique Monastrell 3 months French oak. Fragrant, a hint of vanilla and toast, blueberries and cassis, 14% fine structure, some spicy, firm but soft tannins, long finish, nice wine 8. 4.35 euros.

2019 Old vines Expression 85% Monastrell, 10% Syrah, 5% Garnacha, 12 months barrique 14.5% alcohol.

Medium scent vanilla, toast, blueberries, blackberries, full of fine structure, length, complex wine, delicious! I give this one a 9/10! 12.40 euros 9.45 euros at Henri Bloem at an export price of 6.20 euro.

Trapio 2019 Monastrell, 14 months in oak, ungrafted old vines, good structure, lots of flavor, yet fruity, also a bit chemical and slightly vegetal. A wine to sit down for and should be put away for a while. Very nice wine. 15.95 euros

We enter the vineyards of Tony and Adela.

They have 60 hectares and we are here in the low area, around 600 meters altitude.

We go to the vineyard of Adela and Tony who have 60 ha and partly ungrafted. There we taste the sweet wine the enesentia Monastrell Dulce, 4 months oak, late harvest, fermentation stopped by cooling and then filtering, delicious soft fruity sweet wine but not super sweet. 5.50 here and 8.95 for half a litre at Henri Bloem.



After an extensive lunch where we get acquainted with the local gaspachio (not the soup but a kind of pancake with gravy, bread, rabbit and snails) and of course a lot of Yecla wine, we go to the concecho regulator of the DOP Yecla.

First a presentation about the DO about the continental climate which is good for the Monastrell: hot summers, cold winters and little bit of rain: 300-400 mm per year.



Bodegas Evine

Filipe Martinez García is one of the owners together with his sisters of the winery Bodegas Evine where wine has been made for 4 generations. 60 ha, 15-20% Syrah, 80% Monastrell, 100% vegan and certified organic from 2010. 100,000 litres of wine are produced of which 15,000 bottled bottles, the rest is sold in bulk.

The vineyards are located in the lower part of Yecla. The vineyards are already 200 years old. They are going to make wine with very little sulfite next year.

The wines

2021 Maria Sarmiento 85% Monastrell and 15% Syrah, 2 months American oak. Medium fragrant fruity dark fruit, firm tannins also somewhat grippy, 13.5% juicy fresh fruity wine with a lot of structure. Still missing some body. Must be eaten with. 5 Euro.

2018 Llano Quintanilla crianza, 8 months American oak, 100% Monastrell. More fragrant dark fruit, some vanilla, laurel, good body, lots of tannins, fresh high alcohol 14.5%, still a bit burning in the aftertaste. 6 euros.

Kyathos 2018, Monastrell 18 months wood American and French oak, all picked by hand. Only 300 bottles made from this wine. Fragrant a lot of wood in the nose, vanilla, toast, laurel and blackberries and blueberries, mocha, tobacco, high tannin but a bit softer, high alcohol 15%, somewhat burning, full body and length; really solid wine. 15 euros here in the shop.





The last Supper

We go to Ruta del Vino already where delicious dishes are served again and this time with the wines of La Purísima. Another wonderful evening!



Conclusion

In three days we saw a lot, learned a lot about the conditions and of course especially the Monastrell grape. And they know how to make beautiful wines here. Sometimes a bit rustic but mostly beautiful well-made wines. And if you also see that a cooperative also succeeds, and of course the other wine companies too, to make really good wines across the entire range from entry to top wine, then it is a shame that a substantial part is still sold in bulk. It is really worth drinking these wines. I am very impressed (and all of us were) with Barahonda's dishes. If you are in the area, you should at least have a lunch here. We also really enjoyed the local dishes. The best way to discover wines is to go to the place where these wines are made and we did that here and I enjoyed that.

So off you go to Yecla or at least drink its wines!

Ed Carper, Weinakademiker, DipWSET, Registervinoloog owner of the Wineschool Carper Vinum at Zaandam.

Look [here](#) in the wineshop for wine events.